Technology

Toolbox

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**Technology Toolbox**

Critique Summary

The criteria I decided to use to evaluate the web 2.0 tools I explored over the past few months are: usability, availability, instructional worth, safety and security and cost. The first criteria, usability, was probably the most important evaluation aspect for me throughout this critique. There are thousands of technology tools that can be used to support teaching. The rate at which new technologies are becoming available make ease of use a must for most educators. Every teacher that I know already seems to have a full plate and often dread the idea of having to learn and do more. As soon as I get confused with a web tool I disengage and this is a common reaction. Software producers are aware of this phenomenon and I would guess that one of there primary goals when creating new software is making it user friendly. With that being said, personal preference plays a large part in what constitutes easy or usable. I wanted to include availability and cost because if a program or tool is not free and available in multiple formats there is always another one that is. Instructional worth is a criteria that I naturally use to judge anything new that is presented to me whether in a college class or a workshop. I can generally recognize when something has value to my instruction or students fairly quickly. There are several tools that I explored that I know I will never use in my classroom but I suggested to other teachers because of potential worth in a different environment. Safety and security is a criteria that will have to be a criteria of all educators that want to incorporate technology into instruction.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 4 3 2 1  Easy Difficult | In most cases I am not ranking usability against other similar tools. |
| Availability | 5 4 3 2 1  Compatible Tech support  required | Is special equipment/support required or can everyone use this? |
| Instructional Worth | 5 4 3 2 1  Dailey use Rare use | Will this support teaching and learning? |
| Safety and Security | 5 4 3 2 1  Safe and secure Un-secure/safe | I want technology to support what I do not create more headaches. |
| Cost | 5 4 3 2 1  Free Expensive | If its not free I probably will not try it. |

**Browser**: Firefox

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Easy add-ons. Customize browser with click. |
| Availability | 5 | Download and use as default browser or secondary |
| Instructional Worth | 3 | Similar to other browsers |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Customizable security settings |
| Cost | 5 | Free download |

**Aggregators**: Google reader

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 4 | Because I have never used an aggregator it took me a while to understand the concepts. I have not figured out how to get Google reader on by browser so I often forget to look for recent feeds. |
| Availability | 5 | Anyone that has access to the internet can get google reader. |
| Instructional Worth | 3 | I don’t currently have many rss feeds that provide educational improvement. Once I find useful blogs, ect. It will be more useful. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Password protected. Share setting available. |
| Cost | 5 | free |

**Social Bookmarking**: Diigo

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Easy to use and set up. There are tutorials available but I did not need them. |
| Availability | 4 | Once you create an account there are minimal advertisements and no popups. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | Searching the community library for topics of interest rather that using an open internet search provides results based on sites other people actually use. Clicking on top contributors and looking at there bookmarks can give you an idea of what other teachers in your field are using on the net. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Password protected and share settings |
| Cost | 5 | free |

**Internet Search Tools**: bing

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Similar to google. All inclusive search engine so you can specify what type of search you are interested in (images, video, online games…) |
| Availability | 5 | Browser bar easy to add and remove. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | If you sign in you can customize search options. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | If signed in security setting can be set at desired level. I did not experience any pop-ups and advertisements are minimal |
| Cost | 5 | Free |

**WebStart**: Protopage

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Very easy to set up account and customize. Widgets are easy to add and delete. |
| Availability | 5 | Anyone can use as long as they have an email. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | RSS feed and widgets can be customized. My protopage has math related feeds and the calendar is the only online/computer based calendar that is user friendly enough for me to use regularly. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | No adds and its customizable |
| Cost | 5 | Free |

**Weblogs (Blogs)**: SchoolFusion.com Blogs

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Very easy for me to set up. I can enter discussion topics save and add topics for future weeks with a few clicks of the mouse. Easy to post comments and there is a spell check included in the posting window☺ |
| Availability | 3 | Must be a member to post comments. Must be an administrator (me) to add discussion topics. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | The fact that there is a spell check option will make this tool more risk free for users. You can name your posts with your user name or a factitious name. I really feel like students will be comfortable using this blog. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | I can make blogs open for everyone to see or keep them closed to specific classes. |
| Cost | 4 | Free for me and my students. School pays for the service. |

**WikiSpaces**: Wikispaces.com

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 4 | Formatting pages can be a little difficult. It is easy to put stuff on a page but it is a little difficult to manipulate the appearance |
| Availability | 5 | Need to create an account but page can be accessed anywhere. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | Simple and there is a lot of functionality. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Users can make their site secured or unsecured. |
| Cost | 5 | Free. |

**Web-based word processing**: google docs

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | There are a lot of support resources. Many of the functions are similar to Word. |
| Availability | 5 | Set up igoogle account |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | Students can save documents at home and open up at school. Can publish docs so others can read and edit. There are thousands of shared templates that can be used for free. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Can save to personal account or publish work. |
| Cost | 5 | free |

**Web-based spreadsheets & Databases**: google docs

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Similar to excel. Thousands of templates that can be used. |
| Availability | 5 | Set up igoogle account |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | Same benefits as web-based word processing. Very useful to be able to use premade spreedsheets, thousands to choose from. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Save under username or share |
| Cost | 5 | Free |

**Creative Writing**: fanfiction

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 4 | I didn’t really know what I wanted to do or how I would use this. |
| Availability | 5 | Easy to join |
| Instructional Worth | 1 | Could be useful for an English teacher |
| Safety and Security | 2 | Some material is rated mature |
| Cost | 3 | The adds really irritated me |

**Assessment Tools**: hot potatoes

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | With one quick demo I felt confident using this tool. I created a crossword puzzle and loaded it onto my wikispace in about 15 minutes. |
| Availability | 5 | Anyone can download the program. They provide several download options to match your software. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | Easily create quizzes that students can access from home. |
| Safety and Security | 5 |  |
| Cost | 5 | Free |

**Podcasting**: Audacity

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Very simple to use. It seems like there are tons of features available but you don’t have to sift through them to create an audio file. |
| Availability | 4 | Easy downloadable software. Need a microphone either internal or external. |
| Instructional Worth | 4 | If recording audio would benefit instruction than this would be a great tool. |
| Safety and Security | 5 | Users do not have to make audio files public. |
| Cost | 5 | Free |

**Screencasting**: CamStudio

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| Usability | 5 | Easy download and simple format |
| Availability | 5 | Several versions available for download. Need audio recording device. |
| Instructional Worth | 5 | I could record lessons or chunks of lessons and post them to my school webpage using camstudio |
| Safety and Security | 5 | yes |
| Cost | 5 | Free |